

NSW ORAC CASES DECIDED IN 2019

707	Red-backed Buttonquail	Limeburners Creek NP	November 23, 2018	Accepted
718	Grey-headed Albatross	off Port Stephens	June 22, 2008	Accepted
719	South Polar Skua	off South West Rocks	August 30, 2018	Accepted
720	Cook's Petrel	off Crowdy Head	January 20, 2019	Accepted
721	Grey Wagtail	W of Mullumbimby	March 6-7, 2019	Accepted
722	Pied Heron	Pambula Lake	February 4, 2019	Accepted
723	South Polar Skua	off Forster	April 4, 2019	Accepted
724	Mottled Petrel	Port Kembla	April 5, 2019	Accepted
725	Dusky Myzomela	Tomewin	Dec2018 – Jan2019	Accepted
726	South Polar Skua	Bulli Beach	February 28, 2019	Accepted
727	Little Curlew	South West Rocks	September 28, 2018	Not Accepted
729	Northern Shoveler	Fivebough Wetlands	July 30, 2019	Accepted
730	Red-backed Buttonquail	W of Somersby	November 24, 2018	Accepted
731	Northern Royal Albatross	off Kiama	September 11, 2019	Accepted

OVERVIEW

NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee (NSW ORAC) reviewed a total of 14 cases in calendar year 2019, fewer than half of the number of cases reviewed in 2018. Of the 14 cases, 13 were accepted and one was not accepted by the committee.

The most notable of the records reviewed in 2019 was Case 721 which documents the first ever record of a Grey Wagtail in NSW – unfortunately very heavy rainfall the day after it was discovered caused the bird to move on and it was seen by only a small number of observers.

With pale and intermediate morph South Polar Skua being removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List, the committee reviewed three records of this species in 2019 which may indicate that it is occurring more frequently in NSW coastal waters.

The Northern Shoveler record was reviewed by NSW ORAC although it is actually on the BARC Review List (it was on the NSW ORAC Review List in error) and BARC have accepted the ORAC review

and have assigned the record to BARC Case 1096. This is the first record of Northern Shoveler in NSW since July 2006 in North Kempsey (NSW ORAC Case427/BARC Case 1095).

CASE SUMMARIES

Case 707: A Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosus* was heard calling and was recorded before being very briefly seen when flushed at Limeburners Creek National Park on November 23, 2018. The submission was therefore very unusual in that it relied entirely on the recorded calls to confirm the identification. Seven committee members found the recorded calls to be diagnostic of Red-backed Buttonquail and David Stewart of Naturesound was also consulted and agreed that the call was that of Red-backed Buttonquail. The committee voted by majority to accept the record, the first since a record from Dilkoon on January 19, 2017 (NSW ORAC Case 668). Liam Murphy

Case 718: An ORAC committee member sighted photographs of a juvenile Grey-headed Albatross *Thalassarche chrysostoma* taken about 2km off Port Stephens on June 22, 2008 and asked the photographer to make a submission of the sighting. The three photographs clearly showed the characteristics of a juvenile Grey-headed Albatross including the extensive dark hood, bill structure and colour, and the typical bull-necked appearance. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 34th known record for the species in NSW but, with it being removed from the NSW ORAC Review List for a number of years, it is difficult to be certain of the exact number of valid records. Leanne Maffesoni

Case 719: A South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of South West Rocks on August 30, 2018. The excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification although two committee members felt that the bird was a pale morph rather than intermediate, and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It is the first submission of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph birds were removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List on August 31, 2018 and becomes the 11th confirmed record for NSW. Liam Murphy

Case 720: A Cook's Petrel *Pterodroma cookii* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Crowdy Head on January 20, 2019. The excellent photographs together with a brief description allowed the identification to be confirmed and the possibility of Pycroft's Petrel to be eliminated. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 18th accepted record for NSW. Liam Murphy

Case 721: A Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* was discovered at Coopers Creek on the Huonbrook to Wanganui Road west of Mullumbimby on March 6, 2019. The bird gave only brief but diagnostic views and, on the following day, it was relocated and photographs were obtained. These depicted the dark grey tones on the upperparts, distinct eyebrow and yellow undertail coverts which, together with the vertical tail wagging and the swift rocky creek habitat, are all characteristic of this species. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and, although the species is a scarce but regular visitor to northern Australia in the period between October and April, this sighting becomes the first accepted record of the species in NSW. Jeanette Olley

Case 722: A Pied Heron *Egretta picata* was sighted from a boat at Shark Hole, Pambula Lake on February 4, 2019. Although no photographs were obtained, the bird was seen down to a range of 5 metres before being flushed and taking off. The submission was not very detailed in the description of the bird but most members of the committee felt that the description supplied covered the unique characteristics of a Pied Heron. One member voted against acceptance as it was felt that there was insufficient evidence to be sure of the identification but the record was accepted by majority and becomes the 8th confirmed record for NSW and the 5th to be reviewed by NSW ORAC. Annalisse Reed

Case 723: A South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Forster on April 4, 2019. The bird was well seen down to a range of 5 meters and the excellent diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification although two committee members felt that the bird was a pale or pale/intermediate morph. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it is the second submission of South Polar Skua to come before NSW ORAC since pale and intermediate morph birds were removed from the BARC Review List and added to the NSW ORAC Review List in 2018. It becomes the 12th confirmed record for NSW. Mick Roderick

Case 724: A beachcast Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata* was discovered by a member of the public on MM Beach, Port Kembla on April 5, 2019. A photograph of the bird was sent to Australian Seabird Rescue who passed it on to Lindsay Smith at SOSSA and the photograph formed the basis for the submission. The committee voted unanimously to accept the record based on the thick dark carpal bar, dusky chest and white undertail coverts which together eliminate any confusion species. This record becomes the 22nd confirmed record of Mottled Petrel in NSW and the first since multiple sightings off Port Stephens in November 2017 (NSW ORAC Case 684). Vincent Mourik

Case 725: Two Dusky Myzomelas *Myzomela obscura* were seen in the backyard of a home in Tomewin from late December 2018 through early January 2019. A good description of the birds was provided along with diagnostic photographs and the observer clearly ruled out confusion with female or juvenile Scarlet Myzomela. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and, although there are several anecdotal reports of Dusky Myzomela in this area, it becomes only the 3rd confirmed record for NSW. Marama Hopkins

Case 726: A moribund beachcast South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki* was recovered from Sandon Point, Bulli on February 28, 2019. The bird died shortly after recovery and several photographs were taken which formed the basis for the submission. The submitters carefully covered all the diagnostic features of the bird ruling out the possibility of Brown Skua or any of the jaegers and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the third record of South Polar Skua to be accepted by NSW ORAC since it was added to the Review List in 2018 and is the 13th confirmed record for NSW. Graham Barwell and Lindsay Smith

Case 727: A claimed Little Curlew *Numenius minutus* was seen near the boat ramp at South West Rocks between September 28 and October 3, 2018. This case was difficult for the committee to assess since the bird was seen at some distance and only poor quality photographs were obtained. Three members voted for non acceptance in the first round of voting based on a number of factors including length and shape of the bill, an apparent dark loreal stripe and the lack of plumage detail which could be discerned in the photographs. In the second round of voting, an additional two

members voted for non acceptance primarily because of the bill shape and length. Although the bird may have been a Little Curlew, there was insufficient evidence to rule out the possibility of a small Whimbrel, and the Committee therefore voted by majority in favour of non acceptance.

Case 729 (BARC Case 1096): A Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* was seen at the southern end of the Fivebough Wetlands settling ponds of the Leeton Water Treatment Plant from July 30, 2019 through August 3, 2019. Although the submission contained little written description, the diagnostic photographs left no doubt as to the identification and the committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance. It becomes the 7th confirmed record for NSW and the first since a sighting in North Kempsey in July 2006 (NSW ORAC Case 427/BARC Case 1095). It should be noted that Northern Shoveler is on the BARC Review List and will be removed from the NSW ORAC Review List in the next revision. Max O'Sullivan

Case 730: A Red-backed Buttonquail *Turnix maculosus* was seen by two observers crossing Wisemans Ferry Road west of Somersby on November 24, 2018. Although the observers had no optical aids readily to hand, they were able to get close views of the bird to within 2 metres and the description provided in the submission clearly eliminated any confusion species. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 15th record of this species to be reviewed and accepted by NSW ORAC although there have been many more unconfirmed reports of the species in NSW. Margaret Pointer and Kaye Pointer

Case 731: A Northern Royal Albatross *Diomedea sanfordi* was well seen and photographed on a pelagic trip out of Kiama on September 11, 2019. The submission provided a well presented analysis which ruled out confusion with juvenile/immature Southern Royal Albatross and any of the Wandering Albatross complex. The committee voted unanimously in favour of acceptance and it becomes the 12th confirmed record to be accepted by NSW ORAC and the first since a sighting off Wollongong on September 6, 2014 (NSW ORAC Case 636). Graham Barwell and Lindsay Smith

UNCONFIRMED REPORTS

With an increasing number of reports of unusual or rare species being posted onto on-line and social media sites, NSW ORAC is concerned that some of these reports do not receive the level of scrutiny required to verify them as confirmed records. It was agreed by the committee members that NSW ORAC would attempt to gather more information from the authors of postings of species on the NSW ORAC Review List in the form of photographs and/or a submission. If, at the time of publishing this year-end summary, there were reports for which submissions had not been made to NSW ORAC or BARC for species on their Review Lists, NSW ORAC would publish the report as an unconfirmed sighting to clarify that it had not yet undergone a review by the relevant rarities committee. There are eight such reports which have been published on eBird, Eremaea and/or Facebook sites in 2018, and they are listed below.

Light-mantled Albatross was reported from Broadwater Beach on June 29, 2019

Cook's Petrel was reported from Mistral Point on January 27, 2019

Cook's Petrel was reported from the Sydney pelagic trip on October 12, 2019

Cook's Petrel (fresh dead bird) was reported from Narrabeen Lake on December 24, 2019

Little Shearwater was reported from Mistral Point on February 23, 2019

Little Shearwater was reported from Broadwater Beach on June 28, 2019

Little Shearwater was reported from Sawtell Beach on July 1, 2019

Little Shearwater was reported from Broadwater Beach on July 1, 2019

Roger McGovern

Secretary NSW Ornithological Records Appraisal Committee

January 20, 2019